Words and Deeds

Hindu and Buddhist Rituals in South Asia

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Samāśrayaṇa in Śrīvaiṣṇavism

This paper evaluates the significance of the concept of *samāśrayaṇa* in the Śrīvaiṣṇava ritual and textual tradition of South India. The first section deals with two descriptions of the contemporary ritual of *samāśrayaṇa* and then proceeds to compare it with a standard textual account of the ritual given in the *Parāśaraviśiṣṭaparamadharmaśāstra*. These accounts of *samāśrayaṇa* as ritual are then viewed, briefly, against the background of the interpretation of *samāśrayaṇa* in the theological writings of the Śrīvaiṣṇava *ācāryas* around the same period. Such an evaluation will show that in the period between the 12th–15th centuries there is a sustained reflection in Śrīvaiṣṇava literature on how *samāśrayaṇa* is to be understood, yielding a range of not necessarily reconcilable meanings. This section of the paper examines the implications of such a broad definition of the concept against the light of certain recent theories and formal definitions of ritual action and suggests that in a highly self-reflective theological tradition such as that of the Śrīvaiṣṇavas the meaninglessness of ritual activity in a specific sense was not only acknowledged but even endorsed precisely because such meaninglessness can be located within a larger vision of the divine plan for human salvation. The final section of the paper shows that these theological reflections ultimately had an effect on ritual practice, moulding it and recreating it in such a manner as to make it consistent with doctrine.

Samāśrayaṇa Today

In his 1931 monograph on the Śrīvaiṣṇava Brahmins K. Rangachari stated that every Śrīvaiṣṇava has to be initiated into the secrets of the Vaiṣṇavite religion by a teacher and that this can only be done after he/she had undergone the initiation of the "five rites" (*pañcasaṃskāra*) more commonly called, from perhaps as early as the 12th–13th centuries "resorting [to Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa]" or *samāśrayaṇa*.[1]

1 "To call oneself a Shrivaishnava Brahmin this initiation is necessary. Even non-Brahmans undergo this ceremony of Panchasamskāra if they are to become Vaishnavas" (Rangachari 1986: 36).

Simply put, this initiation consists of five rites in the following order: there is the branding of the initiate with certain emblems (more specifically, the weapons) of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa called *tāpasaṃskāra*, the wearing of his insignia on various parts of the body called *puṇḍrasaṃskāra*, the taking on of a Vaiṣṇava name called *nāmasaṃskāra*, the initiation into certain Vaiṣṇava *mantras* called *mantrasaṃskāra* and, finally, obtaining the idol form (*vigraha*) of the God for private worship called *yāgasaṃskāra*. This initiatory ritual, or certain aspects of it, appears to have been a marker of Vaiṣṇava identity in the Tamil country at least since the 9th century C.E. Thus, we already have a reference to it in a Tamil verse of that period where the poet states that those such as he serve Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa after having been branded with a red-hot discus and conch.[2] The initiation was also undoubtedly a conversion or induction ceremony of sorts into the Vaiṣṇava community in the Chola period (when Vaiṣṇavism vied constantly with Śaivism for greater royal patronage) and a means by which anyone—male, female and belonging to any of the four *varṇas*—could become a Vaiṣṇava.[3]

Samāśrayaṇa ceremonies which take place nowadays among the Śrīvaiṣṇavas are frequently mass ritual ceremonies with an *ācārya* fixing an auspicious day and time and doing *samāśrayaṇa* for a group of people simultaneously.[4] Both the ceremonies described here, though, were done for individual, female initiates and the account given here is not a detailed description of each of the ceremonies. Hence, a full account of the sub-rites and *mantras* involved is omitted. Instead, the paper delineates the broad features of the contemporary ritual of *pañcasaṃskāra* as it is performed today and compares this with one standard prescriptive account of the ritual in the Āgamic literature. Further, by reflecting on the performances witnessed, the paper demonstrates how the ritual, in practice, has come to be re-defined or reinterpreted on the basis of theological considerations. The paper therefore concludes by showing that, at least in the case

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2 The reference is from the *Tiruppallāṇḍu* of Periyāḻvār. *Tiruppallāṇḍu* v. 7a–b: *tīyiṟpolikiṉṟaceñcuṭarāḷi tikaḻtiruccakkarattiṉ | kōyiṟporiyālēoṟṟuṇṭuniṉṟu kuṭikuṭiyāṭceykiṉṟōm.*

3 The probability that *pañcasaṃskāra* was a conversion ritual to Śrīvaiṣṇavism in the medieval period is strengthened by the evidence of the Śrīvaiṣṇava hagiographical literature which came to be composed sometime after the mid-12th century C.E. On this evidence see my forthcoming article "*Pañcasaṃskāra* as Historical Practice in the Śrīvaiṣṇava Hagiographical Literature" in the Proceedings of the Conference, *The Relationship between Viśiṣṭādvaita and Pāñcarātra*, September 2003, Vienna.

4 This, for instance, is common practice at Ahobilam, Tamil Nadu where such large-scale ceremonies take place at the Ahobila *maṭha* on a daily basis (oral conversation with Prof. M.A. Venkatakrishnan in April 2003).

of certain rituals, there is a close relationship between theology and ritual of a kind which is sometimes questioned in the anthropological approach to ritual.

Here, I first describe the main features of a typical *samāśrayaṇa* done for an individual instead of a mass ceremony, for a female initiate by the current incumbent *ācārya* Śrī Raṅga Rāmānuja Mahādeśikaṉ of the Śrīraṅgam Śrīmuṣṇam Śrīmad Āṇḍavaṉ Āśrama, which took place in January 2001 in Chennai, India.

The female initiate was told to come to the religious institution, the *maṭha*, at a specific time in the morning dressed in the traditional clothes (which for women means wearing the saree, which is called *maḍicāṟu,* in the traditional way by tucking one end of it in the back). She was told to bring with her a specified amount of milk, clarified butter, betel leaves and areca nuts on a plate (*tāmbūla*), fruit and an appropriate amount of money which would be the sacrificial fee (*gurudakṣiṇā*). The *samāśrayaṇa* is choreographed in such a way that several of the auxiliary rites of which the main one is the offering of oblations into the fire, the *homa*, is done not by the *ācārya* himself but by a disciple of his. The plate with the fruits, betel leaves and areca nuts was placed beside the brick mound (*homakuṇḍa*) created for lighting a sacrificial fire. A coconut was placed on the plate draped with some yellow threads. Next to the plate four square-shaped wooden vessels were placed, two of them filled with milk, the other two with clarified butter. The ritual of *samāśrayaṇa* began with the disciple lighting the fire and pouring into it the oblations of clarified butter doing a Sudarśana *homa*, followed by further oblations to the accompaniment of the Viṣṇu Gāyatrī and the Puruṣa Sūkta. While much of the *homa* was being done the female initiate was sent to have a symbolic bath which involved washing her feet and hands. On returning she was made to stand next to the fire facing east such that she and the disciple stood parallel to each other.

The disciple then made the initiate repeat after him the words: *asmat gurubhyo namaḥ*. Next, the initiate repeats after him, twice, the salutations in Sanskrit to the teacher-disciple lineage (*guruparaṃparā*) of the incumbent *ācārya* beginning with him and going backwards twelve generations to Rāmānuja himself. Thus, one begins with *śrī raṅga rāmānuja mahādeśikāya namaḥ* and concludes with *śrīmate bhagavate bhāṣyakārāya mahādeśikāya namaḥ*. Then the initiate is made to recite, once, the laudatory verses to the two most important *ācāryas* of that particular *maṭha's* teacher-disciple lineage, Vedānta Deśika and Rāmānuja, and concludes this with salutations to Nārāyaṇa. The disciple then has the initiate ask to have *pañcasaṃskāra* in order to be rid of all defects (*doṣa*), without remainder and then the first line of the Nārāyaṇa Mantra known as the Dvaya which goes, "I take refuge at the feet of Nārāyaṇa" (*śrīman nārāyaṇa caraṇau śaraṇam prapadye*). The initiate follows this up, at the instigation

of the disciple, with a recitation of the first *śloka* of the Viṣṇusahasranāmastotra. This part of the ritual, which also concludes the *homa*, is wound up with the disciple offering the initiate unbroken rice (*akṣata*) and receiving a sacrificial fee (*dakṣiṇā*) in return.

At this juncture, the *ācārya* appears and facing the initiate, prior to *tāpasaṃskāra,* ties the yellow thread around the initiate's left wrist. Then, facing the initiate, he places the *mantras* of the twelve names of Viṣṇu using hand-gestures (*mudrās*) on various parts of the initiate's body.[5] While this was being done, the disciple heated two copper rods with wooden handles in the sacrificial fire, which had, respectively, a discus and conch affixed to them at one end. The *ācārya* then made the initiate repeat after him the *mantra* of Viṣṇu's discus and then fold the arms.

The red-hot rod with the discus on it was pressed on the right shoulder. Then the *mantra* of the conch, the Pāñcajanya, was recited by both the *ācārya* and the initiate and the rod with the emblem of the conch pressed on the left shoulder. The copper rods were immediately dipped into two square wooden vessels containing milk by the disciple. Next, the disciple handed to the *ācārya* a small wooden bowl containing the white, liquidized mud called Tirumaṇ, used for painting the insignia of Viṣṇu called the *ūrdhvapuṇḍra* on the body.[6] The *ācārya* proceeded to paint these on the female initiate—and this is where the *samāśrayaṇa* ritual for a female deviates from that for a male—the female initiate receives only two such signs unlike the twelve received by the male. Thus, the *ācārya* painted on her forehead the sign with the words: *keśavāya namaḥ*, then making her turn around, on the nape of her neck: *damodarāya namaḥ* and, finally, making her face east, he recited *śriyair namaḥ*. He concluded the *puṇḍrasaṃskāra* by tying a yellow thread around the initiate's right wrist. The *ācārya* then

5 The twelve forms, sequentially, are Keśava, Nārāyaṇa, Mādhava, Govinda, Viṣṇu, Madhusūdana, Trivikrama, Vāmana, Śrīdhara, Hṛṣikeśa, Padmanābha and Dāmodara. Entwistle (1981–82: 18) quotes the *Padmapurāṇa* on these twelve forms and where they are to be invoked: "One should contemplate Keśava on the forehead and Nārāyaṇa on the stomach, Mādhava on the chest and Govinda on the base of the throat, Viṣṇu on the right side, Madhusūdana on the (right) arm, Trivikrama on the (right) shoulder, Vāmana on the left side, Śrīdhara on the left arm, Hṛṣikeśa on the (left) shoulder, Padmanābha on the (small of the) back, and Dāmodara on the back of the neck; saying 'Vāsudeva' one should place water used for washing on the head".

6 On the clay used by the Śrīvaiṣṇavas for the *ūrdhvapuṇḍra* Entwistle (1981–82: 5) says: "Followers of Rāmānuja used a white-coloured clay (*kanyaka*) which is taken from a tank [in Melkote] where it was discovered by the *ācārya* himself [...]. The clay is distributed free in Rāmānuja temples and is used for the white frame of the *ūrdhvapuṇḍra*, though chalk may be used when the special clay is unobtainable".

left after having made the initiate repeat after him, twice, the eight-syllabled Nārāyaṇa Mantra (*oṃ namo nārāyaṇāya*) with a substitution of "*aṃ*" for "*oṃ*".

This part of the *samāśrayaṇa* is completed with the initiate repeating the salutations to the teacher-disciple lineage with which the ritual commenced, followed by a Tamil verse which recites the lineage from Rāmānuja back to Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa and concludes with the acknowledgement that she has taken refuge with the *ācārya* and through him has surrendered herself at the feet of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa.

The *samāśrayaṇa* ritual concludes with the initiation into the *mantras*, the *mantrasaṃskāra*. The *ācārya* returns and makes the initiate repeat after him, thrice, the Dvaya Mantra and then *Bhagavadgītā* 18.66, also known as the Caramaśloka. After this, the initiate prostrates at the feet of the *ācārya*, places the fee for the ritual at his feet and receives his blessings. The entire ritual lasts for approximately one-and-a-half hours.

The second ritual of *samāśrayaṇa* was again for a female initiate and took place in Kāñcīpuram on the 13th of April 2003 at the house of the *ācārya*, who was also a married householder, *gṛhastha*, aided constantly in the ceremony by his wife. The initiate was the wife of a retired headmaster and former Sanskrit teacher who had himself undergone the *samāśrayaṇa* ceremony sometime previously and was well-versed (as his enthusiastic participation during the course of the ceremony showed) in the *mantras* and *ślokas* recited during the ritual. The family has a traditional *ācārya-śiṣya* relationship with the family of the famous Teṉkalai scholar Prativāti Payaṅkaram Aṇṇaṅkarācāriyār Svāmi and the *samāśrayaṇa* ceremony described here was performed by the grandson of the latter, P.B. Rajahamsa Chariyar.[7]

The first and obvious difference between this occasion and the previous one was that it was an initiation for a Teṉkalai and not a Vaṭakalai initiate. Secondly, it was performed not by an ascetic head of a *maṭha* but a married Śrīvaiṣṇava *ācārya*, in the precincts of his own house, in front of his household altar or *pūjā* room. Hence, both the Śrīvaiṣṇava lineage as well as the ritual functions of the *ācārya* were different compared to the previous case and these facts, among

7 I particularly wish to thank Professor M.A. Venkatakrishnan of Madras University Vaishnavism Department who arranged for me to witness and record the ceremony, Shri Rajahamsachariyar for his invaluable explanations during the course of the ceremony as well as his copy of the *Samāśrayaṇapaddhati*, and his family for their generous hospitality. The more detailed account of the performance of this *samāśrayaṇa* ceremony (in contrast to that of the one in Chennai) has been made possible because I was both able to film this ceremony as well as discuss salient features of the ritual with the *ācārya* during and after the performance.

others, also led to significant differences in the ritual which only began to emerge as it progressed.

The ceremony approximately lasted two hours, starting at 9 a.m. in the morning. During the first half-hour neither the initiate nor her spouse were present and one was informed that that they were worshipping at the Varadarāja Perumāḷ temple nearby and would arrive shortly. At the beginning of the ceremony Rajahamsa Chariyar gave me a list of the most important sub-rites (*kriyā*) which, in his view, were an indispensable part of the *samāśrayaṇa* ceremony: the gathering together of the *pañcagavya* (*pañcagavyasammelana*) and the fire-sacrifice, *homa*, for the Śrīsūkta, the Puruṣasūkta and Aṣṭākṣaramantra and, finally, the *śāntihoma*.

The ceremony took place in the central hall of the house of the *ācārya* directly in front of the *pūjā* room, which was kept open throughout the ceremony and which had the metal rods with the images of Viṣṇu's discus and conch lying before the deities worshipped.

In front of Rajahamsa Chariyar was the unlit *homakuṇḍa*, to the left of which was the *kalaśa*, the water-pot filled with water, resting on a bed of rice, decorated at its rim with mango leaves. On the leaves rested a coconut on which was draped the thread, which would eventually be tied around the left wrist of the initiate.

The ceremony began with the *ācārya* paying his respects to the entire community of Śrīvaiṣṇavas and declaring the formal intention (*saṃkalpa*) of performing the ceremony of *pañcasaṃskāra*.[8] The next step was the worship of Viṣvaksena, undertaken in order that all the ritual activity to follow thereafter would be successfully concluded.[9] Hence, Viṣvaksena was invoked and then worshipped with the traditional *upacāras*.[10] This initial rite concluded again with a formulaic statement of intention (which recurred several times in the course of the ceremony) to do the *pañcasaṃskāras*.[11] Then there was the proclamation of

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8 The *saṃkalpa* closed with the following words: *eteṣāṃ mama svācāryasya śiṣyāṇāṃ tāpādi pañcasaṃskāra-karma kariṣye.*

9 *Viṣvaksenaṃ saparivāraṃ sūtram-adhisametam ādau āvāhayāmi.*

10 As Bühnemann (1988: 64) has pointed out, the number of *upacāras* offered can differ, providing they are considered complete: "The worship with the five *upacāras* (*pañcopacārapūjā*) is very common while the one with the sixteen *upacāras* (*ṣoḍaṣopacāra*) is the standard type of *pūjā* to be performed in temples, also at home when there is sufficient time or a special occasion. Five as well as sixteen are symbolic numbers both signifying completeness. When something consists of five or sixteen parts it is considered complete". During the ceremony I witnessed the *upacāras* offered were of the first variation.

11 *Śrībhagavadājñābhagavadkaiṅkaryarūpau tāpa-saṃskārārthaṃ puṇḍra-saṃskārārthaṃ mantra-saṃskārārthaṃ nāma-saṃskārārthaṃ deva-pūjāyāṃ saṃskārthaṃ pañcasaṃskā-

the auspiciousness of the day—*puṇyāham*. At this juncture, the initiate entered the hall with her husband and a female relative and seated herself with the relative in a corner of the room, to the right of the *ācārya*.

There now followed two rites, which concluded with the *homa*. The first was the consecration (through the sprinkling of water and the utterance of *mantras*) of the thread, *pavitra*. The rite is called *rakṣbandhana saṃprokṣaṇa*. The main adjuncts to this rite was the recitation of the Śrī- and Puruṣasūkta, followed by the *vyāhṛtis*. Finally, a consecration *mantra* was recited, which was a Nṛsiṃha Mantra.[12] The second rite was the "uniting of the five cow-products" (*pañcagavya sammelana*) involving the summoning of deities onto the *pañcagavya* with the use of hand gestures, *mudrās*. The final rite in this series was the performance of a series of *homas* which the *ācārya* announced through reciting the *saṃkalpas* for each of them, in sequence, as they were done: the *akārādihoma*, *puruṣasūktahoma*, *śrīsūktahoma*, *sudarśanamantrahoma*, *mūlamantrahoma* and the *śāntihoma* with the offering of oblations, *āhutis*, in the fire and concluding with a final oblation, the *pūrṇāhuti*.

On finishing the *homa* the *ācārya* stood up and invited the initiate and her husband to first prostrate before the fire altar before seating themselves to his right. The initiate's husband sat to the right of his spouse. Once seated the initiate received the *pañcagavya* from the *ācarya*. As she sipped it thrice she was made to recite a *śloka* which expressed the wish that the vessel of *pañcagavya*

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rakarma kariṣye. It is important to note that the fifth *saṃskāra* referred to here is not called *yāgasaṃskāra* but *devapūjā*. This term, in fact, accurately describes the fifth *saṃskāra*, in which the initiate is taught how to correctly worship the idol form, which would theoretically have been gifted to him immediately, during the course of the *yāgasaṃskāra* by the *ācārya*. On *devapūjā*, which replaced the conception of the *devayajña* still present in the Āraṇyaka literature see Kane 1974 vol. 2: 705ff. The substitution of the term *devapūjā* for *yāga* is also explicable since Kane points out: "The word *devapūjā* occurs in the Vārtika of Pāṇini I.3.25. The digests show that, just as *yāga* (sacrifice) consists in giving up materials accompanied by a *mantra* with reference to a deity that is principally in view, so *pūjā* is also *yāga*, as therein there is the giving up (or dedication) of materials to a deity" (ibid.: 714).

12 *Tryambakaṃ yajāmahe sugandhaṃ puṣṭivardhanam | puṣpatantur bandhanāt pavitrāṇiyāvṛtāt | tryambakadevatābhyo namaḥ | śrīlakṣmīnṛsiṃhāya namaḥ ||* The first line of this *mantra* is identical with the salutations to Rudra-Tryambaka in the context of the Rājasūya sacrifice given in *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* I.8.6. This line is here integrated into a Nṛsiṃha Mantra.

may purify her of the evil deeds (*pāpa*) present in all ways in her body and soul.[13]

In the next rite, the *ācārya* tied the consecrated thread, *pavitra*, around the initiate's left wrist. Prior to doing so he sprinkled her with water from the *kalaśa*, removed the coconut with the *pavitra* from the pot and placing it on her cupped hands recited the first section of the Śrīsūkta yet again, concluding with the Lakṣmīgāyatrī and the Vedic hymn *badraṃ karṇe* after which the husband tied the thread around the left wrist of his wife thrice. It is after these series of rites that the *pañcasaṃskāra* proper is finally done.

The *ācārya* rose, entered his household shrine and retrieved from it the metal rods with the emblems of the discus (*sudaraśana*) and the conch (*pāñcajanya*) on them. He returned and placed them beside him on a small, metal tray—a glass of water was kept nearby. He heated the discus on the weakly smouldering *homa* fire. In the meantime the initiate had been readied for the branding—*tāpasaṃskāra*—by the female relative and sat facing him with her hands folded.[14] The *ācārya* then made her recite a Sudarśana Mantra:

O discus, Great light akin to a thousand suns,
O Lord show me, ignorant and blind, the path of Viṣṇu.[15]

Then holding the initiate's right arm the *ācārya* said:

śrīsudarśanāya hetirājāya namaḥ

and branded her on her right arm. The wife of the *ācārya* assisted and showed her support by holding the initiate at this point. Next, the conch was heated in the fire and held up in front of the initiate. The Pāñcajanya Mantra was recited first by the *ācārya* and then the initiate:

O Conch, whose sound is true, who makes fit the lost sinner,
Save me, the Sinner, fallen into the Frightful Ocean of Transmigration.[16]

Then the metal rod with the emblem of the conch is pressed on the left shoulder of the initiate with the words:

śrīpāñcajanya śaṅkhādhipataye namaḥ

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13 *Sarvagantugataṃ pāpaṃ dehe tiṣṭhati māmake | vāsanaṃ pañcagavyasya mamātmañca dehaṃś ca śuddhyatām ‖*

14 She had briefly left the ritual space and retired to a nearby room together with the female relative after which she returned with her upper garment—the blouse of her saree—removed such that her upper arms were bare and prepared for the branding.

15 *Sudarśana mahājvāla koṭisūrya samaprabha | ajñānāndhasya me deva viṣṇor mārgaṃ pradarśaya ‖*

16 *Pāñcajanya nijadhvāna dhvastapātakasañcaya | pāhi māṃ pāpi me ghorasaṃsārārṇavapātinam ‖*

After the branding the *ācārya* removed the metal tray with the rods and took them back to his household shrine. When he returned, the second rite—the *puṇḍrasaṃskāra*—took place. It was extremely brief and was done by the wife of the *ācārya* who painted the insignia of Viṣṇu with wet, vermilion powder—the *śrīcūrṇa*—on the forehead, right arm, left arm and neck of the initiate alone even while the *ācārya* repeatedly said: *tāpaḥ puṇḍraḥ*. Soon after this the initiate prostrated herself once more before the *ācārya* saying (in a mixture of Tamil and Sanskrit), "I, a subordinate, am [now] a subordinate of [all] Śrīvaiṣṇavas".[17]

Then, the fourth rite of the five-fold *saṃskāra* ceremony—the *mantrasaṃskāra*—began. It consisted of three parts, in all of which the *ācārya* recited the verses first, followed by the initiate. First there was the recitation of the common *guruparaṃparā* verses of both the Vaṭakalai and Teṉkalai lineages, though this recitation was prefaced by the Teṉkalai verse: *śrīśaileśadayāpātram*. The second part consisted of the recitation of the three *samāśrayaṇa mantras*—the Aṣṭākṣara, the Dvaya and the Caramaśloka, which was taught in a lowered voice by the *ācārya* to emphasise their esoteric nature. The third part consisted of the recitation of the *guruparamparā* verses of the *ācārya's* own lineage beginning with that of Nāthamuni and ending with that of Rājahamsa Chariyar himself. This third part concluded with the words: "The feet of the *ācārya* alone are the refuge. The feet of [Namm]āḻvār, Emperumāṉār [Rāmānuja] and Cīyar [Maṇavāḷamāmuṉi] alone are the refuge".[18]

Once the ceremony was over the initiate and her husband offered the sacrificial fees—*dakṣiṇā*—to Rajahamsa Chariyar's father who was the head of the family and had been present throughout the ceremony though he had not conducted it.

A comparison of the two ceremonies enables one to detect a common script which consists of two main components in the following order: the *samāśrayaṇa* consists of an initial *homa* followed by the *pañcasaṃskāra* in which the order of procedure is *tāpa*, *puṇḍra*, [*nāma*,] *mantra* [and *yāga*]. Nevertheless, even this basic script had been modified, in each of the performances, in significant ways.

The first difference is that the ritual in Chennai was done by a Vaṭakalai ascetic, while the one in Kāñcīpuram was done by a Teṉkalai householder. This difference in the *āśrama* of the *ācārya* concerned led to a division in the ritual

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17 *Aṭiyēṉ śrīvaiṣṇavadāsyai.*

18 Before this part of the ceremony of imparting the *mantras* began Rajahamsachariyar requested that Christoph Emmrich, who had accompanied me to witness the ceremony, leave the room temporarily since he is not a Śrīvaiṣṇava and should not have access to the esoteric aspect of the ceremony. Once the three *mantras* had been taught to the initiate he was allowed to re-enter the room.

duties performed in the course of the ceremony: in Chennai most of the rites prior to the *pañcasaṃskāra* itself (the *rakṣābandhana saṃprokṣaṇa*, *pañcagavya sammelana* and the *homa*) were done by the married disciple of the *ācārya* and these rites were concluded even before the initiate entered the hall of the *maṭha* for the ceremony. The ascetic *ācārya's* ritual duties began after these were concluded when he came in front of the *homakuṇḍa* in order to tie the *pavitra* around the initiate's wrist.[19] In contrast to this Rajahamsa Chariyar did all the preliminary rites himself assisted considerably by his wife during portions of the ceremony. Thus, in effect, in both ceremonies it was a married householder, the *gṛhastha*, who did the rituals preceding the main rite of *pañcasaṃskāra*.

In the sequence of the pre-rites to the *pañcasaṃskāra* two differences are to be noted: in the Kāñcīpuram ritual the tying of the *pavitra* around the wrist of the initiate had been preceded by the consecration and ingestion of the *pañcagavya*. In the Chennai ceremony this did not take place. In contrast, in the Chennai ceremony the *rakṣābandhana* had been followed up by a rite in which the ascetic *ācārya* laid or deposited the twelve *puṇḍras* of the twelve names of Viṣṇu on the body of the initiate. This was not done in the Kāñcīpuram case.

Certain differences also emerged in the performance of the *pañcasaṃskāra* itself. Firstly, the significant role of the wife of the householder *ācārya*, assisting throughout and particularly prompting him when it came to the recitation of the *ślokas* regarding the *guruparamparā*, was reinforced in the *puṇḍrasaṃskāra*. For, then, it was she, not the *ācārya*, who did the *puṇḍrasaṃskāra* for the female initiate.

The next difference was in the *nāmasaṃskāra* ceremony. While it was completely elided in the Vaṭakalai ceremony it is my opinion that it was alluded to in the second, where the female initiate admits to taking on a Śrīvaiṣṇava identity and, hence, name, by acknowledging that she is, henceforth, a "Śrīvaiṣṇavadāsī".

Two differences could be noticed as far as the *mantrasaṃskāra* was concerned. The first is again traceable to the difference in *āśrama* between the *ācāryas*: when the *guruparamparā* of an ascetic lineage is recited one begins with the incumbent and traces the lineage backwards, for the *gṛhastha* it is done the opposite way. The second difference was doctrinal, reflecting the influence of the schismatic dispute within Śrīvaiṣṇavism. One of the so-called "eighteen points of difference" between the two schools of Śrīvaiṣṇavism—*aṣṭhādaśabhe-*

19 Speaking of the ancient laws pertaining to ascetic life, Olivelle (1995: 18) states: "Two of the most ancient of such rules are the prohibition on the use of fire and on a stable residence outside the rainy season. Ancient texts use the epithet *anāgni* 'fireless man' with reference to ascetics".

dāḥ—lies in the fact that the Vaṭakalais believe that women should not pronounce the *praṇava*, *oṃ*, when they utter *mantras* while the Teṉkalais permit this. This theological difference emerged as established in the respective ceremonies witnessed: in the Vaṭakalai ceremony the female initiate substituted *aṃ* for the *praṇava* of the three esoteric *mantras* taught while in the Teṉkalai ceremony she said *oṃ*.

Most importantly, in both cases the *pañcasaṃskāra* ceremony, in effect, concluded after the *mantrasaṃskāra* and the fifth and final rite, the *yāgasaṃskāra*, did not take place. In other words, it does not seem to be a component of the *pañcasaṃskāra* ceremony as we know it today and the ceremony performed these days may be properly called a *catuḥ-saṃskāra*. The reason for this becomes clear in the next section, where a relatively late textual account of the ceremony is examined.

Samāśrayaṇa in the *Parāśaraviśiṣṭaparamadharmaśāstra*

The *Parāśaraviśiṣṭaparamadharmaśāstra* is a not earlier than 12th century ritual appendage to the *Parāśarasmṛti*. The brief editorial introduction to the printed copy of the *Parāśaraviśiṣṭaparamadharmaśāstra* which I possess identifies the *Parāśarasmṛti* with the *Parāśarasaṃhitā* and further states that the *Parāśaraviśiṣṭaparamadharmaśāstra* is considered to be the latter portion (*uttarabhāga*), to be found only in southern recensions of the text. The *New Catalogus Catalogorum* (vol. 11: 208) indicates that there are at least two *Parāśarasmṛtis*. The more famous one is that which is summarized in Chapter 107 of the *Garuḍapurāṇa*. The other is a [Pāñcarātra] Śrīvaiṣṇava theological text with the colophons of all the available manuscripts containing only an *uttarakhaṇḍa*. To add to the confusion, in his bibliography of Pāñcarātra texts Daniel Smith lists and describes a *Parāśarasaṃhitā*, which is a work of approximately 2000 *ślokas* divided into thirty-one chapters. It speaks of both the *āḻvārs* and the *ācāryas* such as Nāthamuni leading him to the conclusion "that the composition of this work must have been before the 15th century but considerably after the time of Sundara [sic]. Thus it belongs to the Saṃhitās of the 'later' period" (Smith 1978: 61–62). A comparison of the contents of this *Parāśarasaṃhitā* with the *Parāśaraviśiṣṭaparamadharmaśāstra* could not be undertaken for this study, since I do not possess a copy of this former work. Nevertheless, even a cursory examination of the chapterization of the *Parāśarasaṃhitā* given in Smith (1978: 188–196) with the chapterization and contents of the *Parāśaraviśiṣṭaparamadharmaśāstra* indicates wide discrepancies. This, at the very least, seems to indicate that the *Parāśaraviśiṣṭaparamadharmaśāstra* is not a straightforward textual extract from the

Pāñcarātra *Parāśarasaṃhitā* described by Smith but, in the event of being one, has undergone considerable modification. At this stage, all that can be said about the text is that, inasmuch as it deals at such length with the *pañcasaṃskāras*, it cannot be an earlier than 12th century text. The text, in the edition consulted, consists of the following ten chapters:

description of *tāpasaṃskāra* (*tāpasaṃskāravaraṇa*)

sequence of *puṇḍrasaṃskāra* (*puṇḍrasaṃskārakrama*)

sequence of *mantrasaṃskāra* (*mantrasaṃskārakrama*)

sequence of *yāgasaṃskāra* (*yāgasaṃskārakrama*)

worship of the Blessed One and the rights pertaining to one's station in life (*bhagavadārādhanavarṇāśramadharmavarṇana*)

extensive description of daily worship (*vistṛtanityārādhanakrama*)

description of the swing festival (*ḍolotsavavarṇana*)

description of occasional festivals (*naimittikotsavavarṇana*)

description of the "great festival" (*mahotsavavarṇana*)

worship of Bhāgavatas and their greatness (*vaiṣṇavārādhana-tanmāhātmyavarṇana*)

The analysis in this section concentrates on the first four chapters. The text begins with the seers (*munis*) asking Parāśara to instruct them in detail about how to do *samāśrayaṇa* to Hari and how to worship him. Parāśara replies that he will do so and, in addition, also inform them about the injunction relating to the *mantra* initiation (*mantradīkṣāvidhi*).

He then adds: "Foremost, indeed, regarded as Vaiṣṇava, is the bearing of, among others, the conch, the discus, the insignia, [undergoing] the naming ritual, the *mantra* and the ritual worship of Hari. Five *saṃskāras*) have to be done for the Brahman, according to the precepts".[20]

A detailed description of the *pañcasaṃskāras* begins in verse 10 of this first chapter, with that of the first rite, the *tāpasaṃskāra*. The *ācārya* does the *tāpa-*

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20 *Parāśaraviśiṣṭaparamadharmaśāstra* I: 1–4a: *vistareṇa samākhyāhi hari-samāśrayaṇaṃ param | katham āśrayaṇaṃ nṛṇāṃ katham ārādhanaṃ vibhoḥ ‖ vakṣyāmi munayoḥ sarve viṣṇor āśrayaṇakṛyām | mantradīkṣāvidhiś caiva tasya pūjāvidhiṃ tathā ‖ ādyaṃ tu śaṅkhacakrādidhāraṇaṃ vaiṣṇavaṃ smṛtam | puṇḍraṃ nāmakriyā caiva mantraścaivārcanaṃ hareḥ ‖ saṃskārāḥ pañcakartavyā brahmaṇasya vidhānataḥ |* It has been suggested to me that among the Pāñcarātra Āgamas, the *ratnatraya* (*Sāttvata, Jayākhya* and *Pauṣkara*) do not deal with the *pañcasaṃskāra* but with *dīkṣā*. Among the first texts to deal at length with the ceremony appears to be the *Īśvarasaṃhitā* which, inasmuch as it deals with the rituals of Mēlkoṭṭai would be a Saṃhitā of the Rāmānuja/post-Rāmānuja period of Śrīvaiṣṇavism (personal communication from Dr. Marion Rastelli).

saṃskāra on an auspicious day, in the early part of it (*pūrvāhni*), after having bathed and worshipped Viṣṇu, for the *śiṣya* who is summoned to the ceremony after his daily ablutions, whose sacred thread ceremony has taken place (*kṛta-kautukamaṅgalam*) (10).[21] The *ācārya* has already had models (*pratikṛti*) of the conch, discus etc. made out of metals such as gold, silver or copper (11–12).[22] These model weapons are first purified in the "five-fold nectar" (*pañcāmṛta*) and then worshipped with flowers and the *mantras* pertaining to them (13). The *ācārya* then establishes the sacrificial fire, *homa*, according to the *gṛhyasūtra* of his lineage, does the *homa* to the extent of placing the fuel sticks in the fire (*idhmādhāna*) (14) and, then, placing the weapons on the fire he sacrifices together with the disciple (15).[23] The disciple, who is seated facing the east, is anointed with water consecrated with *mantras* and then is to be branded with the conch, discus and other weapons (16–17).[24] He is first branded on his upper left arm with the discus, then with the conch on his right, upper arm, with the mace in the middle of the forehead, with the sword on the heart and the bow on the head (17–18).[25]

The second chapter deals with the ritual sequence of the *puṇḍrasaṃskāra*. The *ācārya* does the rite on another day. He begins by drawing the twelve *puṇḍras* of the twelve names of Viṣṇu on the ground, or on sand strewn for that purpose (3).[26] The twelve forms of Viṣṇu are worshipped on these *puṇḍras*, in sequence and then honoured with the *upacāras*, before doing a *homa*, similar to the one which took place for the *tāpasaṃskāra* (4–5).[27]

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21 Ibid. I: 10: *snātvā śubhe 'hni pūrvāhne samyagabhyarcya keśavam | snātuṃ śiṣyaṃ samāhūya kṛtakautukamaṅgalam ||*

22 Ibid. I: 11–12: *ācāryo vidhivat kuryāt cakrapuṇḍrādi satkriyām | kārayet śaṅkhacakrādihetipratikṛtīḥ śubhāḥ || svarṇarājatatāmrādidravyaiḥ kuryād yathocitam | śaṅkhaṃ cakraṃ gadāṃ khaḍgaṃ śārṅgaṃ pañcāyudhaṃ kramāt ||*

23 Ibid. I: 14–15: *purato 'gniṃ pratiṣṭhāpya svagṛhyoktavidhānataḥ | idhmādhānādi paryantaṃ tāmbūlañca nivedayet || paścāt pañcāyudhanyagnau pratikṣipya ca yathāvidhi | juhūyāt hetimantraiś ca śiṣyeṇa sahoto guruḥ ||*

24 Ibid. I: 16–17a: *namaskuryāt tato bhaktyā devadevaṃ janārdanam | prāṅmukhaṃ tu samāsīnaṃ śiṣyaṃ mantrajalāplutam || pratapec chaṅkhacakrādihetibhiḥ prayato guruḥ |*

25 Ibid. I: 17b–18b: *pavitreṇāṅkhayet pūrvaṃ bāhumūlaṃ tu dakṣiṇam || śaṅkhena pratapet savyaṃ gadayā phalamadhyamam | tathā khaḍgena hṛdayaṃ śārṅgenaiva tu mastakam ||*

26 Ibid., II: 3: *sthaṇḍile saikate vāpi hyupalipya tato guruḥ | dvādaśaitāni puṇḍrāṇi likhet tasmin yathākramam ||*

27 Ibid. II: 4–5: *aṣṭapuṇḍrāṇy aṣṭadikṣu madhye catvāri vinyaset | vyāharan sarvapuṇḍreṣu keśavādīn yathākramam || āvāhanārghyapādyaiś ca dhūpadīpanivedanaiḥ | saṃpūjyāgniṃ prathiṣṭhāpya homaṃ pūrvavad ācaret ||*

Once the *homa* is finished, the *ācārya* begins to paint the *puṇḍras* on the seated disciple who, henceforth, is to wear the *puṇḍras* (painted with mud taken from a site holy to Vaiṣṇavas and consecrated with the Mūlamantra) on a daily basis (8–9).[28] Several verses follow which are devoted to the correct measurements of the *puṇḍra* (10), how one should draw it accurately (11–12) and the consequences of not doing so (13–14). Some verses stress the particular necessity of wearing the *ūrdhvapuṇḍra* when obligatory rituals such as the morning and evening *sandhyā*, the evening *japa*, *homa* and *śrāddha* are done (15–16).[29] If one performs these rituals without wearing it they would be unsuccessful (17).[30] With this set of verses the core elements of the *puṇḍrasaṃskāra* are mentioned and concluded. The rest of this section of the second chapter is devoted to establishing the superiority of the *ūrdhvapuṇḍra* over the *tripuṇḍra* of the Śaivites and then concludes with once again listing the deities of each of the *puṇḍras*.

The second part of the second chapter, which begins with verse 45, deals with the *nāmasaṃskāra*. Parāśara suggests that the naming ceremony, *nāmakarma*, could be done at different phases in the individual's life: at the time of the naming ceremony after birth, at the tonsure, during the sacred-thread ceremony or at the time of the *puṇḍrasamskāra* itself, before the study of the *mantras* (45–46).[31] The name can be that of one of the forms of Viṣṇu, such as Vāsudeva or Keśava, one of his emanations (*vyūha or vibhava*) or any other auspicious Vaiṣṇava name (46–47).[32] The ceremony itself, if one were to do it as part of the *pañcasaṃskāra* ceremony, is described in one-and-a-half verses. Viṣṇu is first worshipped, the deity whose name will be bestowed is meditated upon and worshipped with *upacāras*. After that one offers oblations (into the *homa*).[33] It is to be presumed, even though this is not explicitly stated in the text, that the

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28 Ibid. II: 8–9: *namaskṛtya tataḥ śiṣyo guruṃ sarvaguṇānvitam | tadāprabhṛti puṇḍrāṇi mṛdā dhāryāṇi nityaśaḥ || ādāya vaiṣṇave kṣetre mṛttikāṃ vimalāṃ śubhām | mūlamantreṇābhimantrya cordhvapuṇḍrāṇi dhārayet ||*

29 Ibid. II: 15–16: *sandhyākāle jape home svādhyāye pitṛtarpaṇe | śrāddhe dāne ca yajñe ca dhārayed ūrdhvapuṇḍrakam || ūrdhvapuṇḍraṃ tu viprāṇāṃ sandhyānuṣṭhānakarmavat | śrāddhakāle viśeṣeṇa kartā bhoktā ca na tyajet ||*

30 Ibid. II: 17: *ūrdhvapuṇḍravihīnastu karma yat kiñcid ācaret | tat sarvaṃ viphalaṃ yāyād iṣṭāpūrtam api dvijāḥ ||*

31 Ibid. II: 45–46a: *nāmakarma pravakṣyāmi pāpanāśanam uttamam | jātakarmaṇi vā kṣaure tathā mauñjīnibandhane || mantrādhyayanakāle vā nāma kuryād vidhānataḥ |*

32 Ibid. II: 46b–47: *vāsudevādayo ye ca mūrtayaḥ keśavādayaḥ || matsyakūrmādayo vyūhāḥ vibhavaś ca tathā 'pare | teṣām anyatamaṃ nāma dadyād vānyaṃ śubhāhvayam ||*

33 Ibid. II: 48–49a: *abhyarcya vidhivad viṣṇuṃ nāmamūrtim anusmaran | āvāhanārghyapādyaiś ca dhūpadīpādibhis tathā || gandhapuṣpādināabhyarcya juhūyāc ca vidhānataḥ |*

disciple receives the new name after this *homa*. In verses 51–52 it is strongly recommended that the *ācārya* bestow upon the disciple the name of the particular form of Viṣṇu who is also the "lord of the month" (*māsādhipathi*) on which the ceremony is performed.[34] The final verse of the chapter recommends that the name consist of two components: a name of Viṣṇu or one of his devotees and a suffix—*dāsa*, "servant".[35]

The third chapter deals with *mantrasaṃskāra*. Some initial verses describe the pertinent *homa*: oblations of ghee are to be offered accompanied by the recitation of the Viṣṇu and Nārāyaṇa Mantras (such as the Dvaya and Aṣṭottara), the Puruṣasūkta, the Viṣṇugāyatrī, among others (2–3).[36] After these oblations are concluded the *ācārya* brings a *kalaśa* filled with water consecrated with the Dvaya- and Mūlamantras and sprinkles the disciple with this consecrated water even while reflecting on the same *mantras* again. After this the water has to be sipped three times (4–7).[37] Then the *ācārya* places his right hand on the disciple's head, his left hand on his heart and gazing with compassion upon him, contemplating his own *ācārya* is his heart, reciting the *guruparaṃparā* of the lineage, he begins the process of teaching the *mantras*.[38] The *mantrasaṃskāra* is initiated through a prayer first addressed to the Goddess:[39]

> You are the mother of all, O Beloved of the Lord of all the Worlds,
> Ignore/overlook/tolerate (*śrāvayasva*) this person today, who is surrounded (*vṛta*) with these thousand transgressions.

Then, says the text, after appealing to the Goddess, the Lord is resorted to with the following words:

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34 Ibid. II: 51–52: *yā tanmāsapatermūrtiḥ tatra tāṃ deśikaḥ svayam | parikramya namaskṛtya hyāvāhya purato hareḥ || tanmūrtiṃ manasā dhyātvā nāma tasyāḥ pracodayet | nāma vaiṣṇavatāhetuḥ mukhya ity ucyate budhaiḥ ||*

35 Ibid. II: 53: *yojayen nāma dāsāntaṃ bhagavannāmapūrvakam | tathā bhāgavatānāṃ ca nāma syāt nāmapūrvakam ||*

36 Ibid. III: 2–3: *snātaṃ śiṣyaṃ samāhūya homaṃ kuryād vidhānataḥ | mantradvayena juhūyāt ājyam aṣṭottaraṃ śatam || vaiṣṇavyā caiva gāyatryā mūlamantreṇa deśikaḥ | hutvā pradakṣiṇaṃ kṛtvā saśiṣyaḥ praṇamed guruḥ ||*

37 Ibid. III: 4b–7a: *tataḥ kalaśa ādhāya pavitrajalasaṃbhṛte || tulasīṃ gandhadūrvāgre kauśeyaṃ gaurasarṣapam | abhimantrya dvayenātha mūlamantreṇa mantravit || tena samārjayet śiṣyaṃ mantraratnena deśikaḥ | samārjayec ca taṃ śiṣyaṃ mūlamantram anuttamam || prāśayet salilaṃ paścāt trivāraṃ mantravic ca tam |*

38 Ibid. III: 7b–8: *mūrdhnī hastaṃ vinikṣipya dakṣiṇaṃ jñānadakṣiṇam || savyaṃ ca hṛdaye nyasya kṛpayā vīkṣayed guruḥ | svācāryaṃ hṛdaye dhyātvā japtvā guruparaṃparām ||*

39 Ibid. III: 9–10: *tataḥ samprārthayet devīṃ sarvalokeśvarīṃ priyām | mātā tvaṃ sarvalokānāṃ sarvalokeśvarapriye || śrāyayasvainam adyemaṃ aparādhaśatair vṛtam | evaṃ rāmāṃ puraskṛtya paścāt devaṃ samāśrayet ||*

O Nārāyaṇa, Ocean of Compassion, Sea of the Quality of Parental Love,
Rescue this Evil-doer O God, who has come [to you] out of compassion.[40]

After reciting these two verses the *ācārya* proceeds to teach the initiate the "Jewel among the *mantras*" which is the Dvaya Mantra, followed by the eight-syllabled Aṣṭākṣaramantra.[41] The next verse states emphatically that the *mantrasaṃskāra* can only take place after the disciple has been branded with the conch and discus. A *guru* who imparts the *mantras* without these preliminary *saṃskāras* to a disciple goes to hell.[42] The *mantrasaṃskāra* is brought to a close by finishing the *homa* and feeding Brahmins.[43]

The fourth and final chapter, in terms of this analysis, concerns the *yāgasaṃskāra*. Sometime after the above-mentioned rites have taken place, the initiated disciple visits the *guru* and obtains from him, with his blessings, an idol (*vigraha*) of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa with that of his consorts, Śrī, Bhūmi and Nīlā which he has to henceforth worship every day of his life.[44] Prior to giving the main idol of a form of Viṣṇu-Nārayaṇa to the disciple, the *guru* establishes a *homa* (4) and does oblations which involve the recitation of the important Vedic and Pāñcarātric *mantras* already mentioned in the previous chapters (5–6).[45] Once the *homa* is concluded the *guru* gives the idol to the disciple, teaches him the proper manner of worship, has the disciple do the worship himself and sees to the feeding of Vaiṣṇava Brahmins.[46]

A comparison of the two performances of this ritual witnessed with the textual account of it in the four chapters of the *Parāśaraviśiṣṭaparamadharmaśāstra* shows, in principle, that it is remarkably true in its essentials to the textual

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40 Ibid. III: 11: *nārāyaṇa dayāsindho vātsalyaguṇasāgara | trāhyenaṃ pāpinaṃ deva kṛpayā samupāgatam ||*

41 Ibid. III: 17: *adhyāpayet dvayaṃ mantram ācāryaḥ śiṣyavatsalaḥ | adhyāpayet tataḥ paścāt mantram aṣṭākṣaraṃ tathā ||*

42 Ibid. III: 18: *acakradhāriṇaṃ vipraṃ yo 'dhyāpayati deśikaḥ | sa gururnarakaṃ yāti kalpakoṭiśataṃ dvijāḥ ||*

43 Ibid. III: 22: *homaśeṣaṃ samāpyātha brāhmaṇān bhojayet śubhān | yāvaccharīrapātaṃ tu dvayam āvarttayen manum ||*

44 Ibid. IV: 1–2: *śubhakāle vidhānena praṇipatya tato gurum | asya prasādalabdhaṃ tu gṛhītvā vigrahaṃ hareḥ || śrībhūminīlāsahitaṃ sāyudhaṃ saparicchadam | arcayed vigrahaṃ nityaṃ yāvatkālam atandritaḥ ||*

45 Ibid. IV: 4–6: *arcayet pūrvavat snātvā hareḥ saṃpūjya vigraham | homaṃ kuryāt vidhānena śrīmadaṣṭākṣareṇa vai || mantradvayena ca tathā hotavyaṃ vidhinā haviḥ | sūktena ca tathā homaḥ pauruṣeṇa vidhīyate || śatamaṣṭākṣarāt homaḥ mantrābhyāñca tathoditaḥ | sūktena pratyarcaṃ homaḥ hotavyaṃ vidhinā haviḥ ||*

46 Ibid. IV: 8–9a: *tasmai tadvigrahaṃ dattvā vṛttiṃ saṃyak pracodayet | yajñakarmavidhānena saṃyak snātvā gurus tathā || yājayet vaiṣṇavaṃ bhaktyā vaiṣṇavān paritoṣayet |*

account. Where there is deviation it is inevitably in the form of contraction, a telescoping of entire facets of the ritual or even entire auxiliary rites within it to their minimal form. Thus, to begin with, the *Parāśaraviśiṣṭaparamadharmaśāstra* recommends, ideally, that each of the five *saṃskāras* be done on different days with an elaborate *homa* for each occasion. Even so, at the end of the third chapter, after the description of the "sequence of the *mantrasaṃskāra*" the text allows for the possibility that all the *saṃskāras* can be done on one single day provided they are done in orderly succession.[47] Next, there is the fact that *samāśrayaṇa* nowadays consists, in effect, only of three of the *saṃskāras* with the *nāmasaṃskāra* and the *yāgasaṃskāra* being omitted during the ritual. The *Parāśaraviśiṣṭaparamadharmaśāstra* clearly allows for the omission of the *nāmasaṃskāra* at the time of *samāśrayaṇa*. In II: 45–46 the text states that one could have been bestowed with a Vaiṣṇava name at the time of the birth ceremonies (*jātakarman*), or at the time of tonsure or during the sacred thread ceremony, thus allowing for this *saṃskāra* to have taken place prior to *samāśrayaṇa*.[48] What was important is that it had taken place prior to the *mantrasaṃskāra* at some point in time, since one could not be instructed in the Vaiṣṇava *mantras* without a Vaiṣṇava name. Less obviously explicable is the omission of the *yāgasaṃskāra*—which in the Śrīvaiṣṇava context is the obtainment of the idol of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa for daily worship from the *ācārya*, along with the proper instructions on how to conduct this worship[49]—from *samāśrayaṇa* nowadays when it is described in elaborate detail in the fourth chapter of the *Parāśaraviśiṣṭaparamadharmaśāstra*. Firstly, the very fact that the *Parāśaraviśiṣṭaparamadharmaśāstra* allows for the telescoping of the entire ceremony of *pañcasaṃskāra*, at the end of the third chapter, may well be an indication that an elaborate procedure such as teaching the disciple how to do his proper, daily worship may have become redundant to the ceremony by the time of the redaction of the text. This redundancy can only be deduced, though, from the perspective of contemporary, Śrīvaiṣṇava practice. Since most Śrīvaiṣṇava households have one if not several idols of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa in regular, private worship any person born a Śrīvaiṣṇava is expected to be instructed in the procedures of daily worship by the elders of the family or the family priest nowadays rather than the *ācārya*. Finally, allowing for the view that the *Parāśaraviśiṣṭaparamadharmaśāstra* is

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47 Ibid. III: 20: *ekasmin divase vāpi kṛtvā tāpādi saṃskriyāḥ | pṛthak pṛthak cānupūrvyā sarvaṃ kuryād atandritaḥ ||*

48 Ibid. II: 45cd–46ab: *nāmakarma pravakṣyāmi pāpanāśanam uttamam || jātakarmaṇi vā kṣaure tathā mauñjīnibandhane | mantrādhyayanakāle vā nama kuryād vidhānataḥ ||*

49 The name *yāgasaṃskāra*, hence, corresponds to the Mīmāṃsakā definition of *yāga* as the worship of a deity. Cf. *Śabarabhāṣya* IX: 1.6: *api ca yāgo nāma devatā-pūjā.*

prescriptive and gives an account of the ideal ritual, further discrepancies between text and context could also be explained by the adaptation of the *saṃskāras* to changing circumstances. To take the obvious example of the *tāpasaṃskāra*, even the most orthodox of Śrīvaiṣṇavas these days would balk at the idea of being branded, as the *Parāśaraviśiṣṭaparamadharmaśāstra* perhaps hyperbolically recommends, not just with the discus and conch but, in addition, with the mace (*gadā*) on the forehead, the sword (*khaḍga*) on the chest and the bow (*śārṅga*) on the skull.

The significance of *samāśrayaṇa* is laid out by the *Parāśaraviśiṣṭaparamadharmaśāstra* in the very first chapter. The text offers us two main reasons why this ritual is mandatory for all Vaiṣṇavas, women at the time of marriage, men at the time of the sacred, thread ceremony, the *upanayana*.[50] The ritual is a marker of Vaiṣṇava identity, without it one is not a Vaiṣṇava (I: 3)[51] and cannot be instructed in the *mantras* which are necessary for salvation (I: 21–22).[52] A male Brahmin cannot be considered a Brahmin without *samāśrayaṇa* because it complements or is equivalent to the sacred, thread ceremony (I: 4–6).[53] It also follows from this that it is only *samāśrayaṇa* following upon and complementing the sacred thread ceremony that qualifies the Śrīvaiṣṇava for doing any further ritual activity (I: 9)[54] and the *smārta* rituals such as the *śrāddha* ceremony for the dead (I: 7).[55]

Thus, in the final analysis, it is by drawing an explicit parallel between the ritual and *upanayana*, that the *Parāśaraviśiṣṭaparamadharmaśāstra* validates this Śrīvaiṣṇava ritual as a *saṃskāra* par excellence. By doing so, the text explicitly draws legitimacy from none less than Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā in as much as in the *Mīmāṃsā-sūtras* VI: 1.35 the word *saṃskāra* is synonymous with that ritual which qualifies the male for Vedic learning, the *upanayana*. And by elevating

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50 *Parāśaraviśiṣṭaparamadharmaśāstra* I: 22cd–23ab: *udvāhasamaye strīṇāṃ puṃsāṃ caivopanayane || cakrādidhāraṇaṃ proktaṃ mantraiḥ pañcāyudhasya ca |*

51 Ibid. I: 3: *ādyaṃ tu śaṅkhacakrādidhāraṇaṃ vaiṣṇavaṃ smṛtam | puṇḍraṃ nāmakriyā caiva mantraś caivārcanaṃ hareḥ ||*

52 Ibid. I: 21cd–22ab: *karmasaṃskārasiddhyarthaṃ jātakarmādi kārayet || mantrasaṃskārasiddhyarthaṃ mantradīkṣāvidhiṃ tathā |*

53 Ibid. I: 4cd–6: *vinā yajñopavītena vinā cakrasya dhāraṇāt || vinā dvayenaiva viprah caṇḍālatvam āpnuyāt | vidhinā śaṅkhacakrādidhāraṇaṃ cordhvapuṇḍrakam || upavītaṃ śikhābandhaṃ viprasya satataṃ smṛtam | cakralāñcanahīnasya vipratvaṃ niṣphalaṃ bhavet ||*

54 Ibid. I: 9: *tasmāt cakrādisaṃskārāḥ kartavyā munisattamāḥ | cakralāñcanahīnena kṛtaṃ karma ca niṣphalam ||*

55 Ibid. I: 7: *acakradhāriṇaṃ vipraṃ yaḥ śrāddhe bhojayen naraḥ | retomūtrapurīṣādīn sa pitṛbhyaḥ prayacchati ||*

samāśrayaṇa to the level of the *upanayana* the Śrīvaiṣṇava ritual theorists were, in effect, doing what Alexis Sanderson (1995: 27) has pointed out regarding the legitimation of Tantric ritual in general: that the rituals aim at "achieving parity with the orthodox by providing the system with equivalents of all the essential *smārta* rites which the invested perform or undergo during adult life and, indeed, beyond it".

Enquiry among contemporary Śrīvaiṣṇavas who have undergone *samāśrayaṇa* about the significance of it for them elicited, as might be expected, a spectrum of responses. Broadly classified, the response was two-fold. Men and women less well-informed or learned in aspects of Śrīvaiṣṇava ritual significance or theology were of the opinion that it was a good thing to do if one wished to intensify one's religious life, become more orthodox as it were. And this becoming more orthodox was seen primarily in terms of further dietary restrictions as well as a more strict adherence to daily worship at the household altar. The response, on the other hand, of orthodox Śrīvaiṣṇava males as to the significance of the ritual was almost text-book perfect—they told me that *samāśrayaṇa* qualified them for all ritual activity whether in the temple or for the domestic, *smārta* rites.

The Theology of *samāśrayaṇa*

This very spectrum of interpretation—of what the ritual of *samāśrayaṇa* signifies today needs to be contextualized theologically as well and evaluated against the background of developments in Śrīvaiṣṇava theology in the post-Rāmānuja period of Śrīvaiṣṇavism. In that period, commencing in the mid-12th century, *ācāryas* such as Tirukkurukaip Pirāṉ Piḷḷāṉ and Nañcīyar wrote the first commentaries on the Tamil devotional poetry of the *āḻvārs*. In the writings of these two *ācāryas*, in particular, we see the emergence of certain doctrines of salvation which are not entirely compatible with each other, an incompatibility which eventually led to a sectarian split within the Śrīvaiṣṇava community and the formation of the "Northern" and the "Southern" schools (Vaṭakalai & Teṉkalai) of Śrīvaiṣṇavism. I give below a summary of the contours of the theological dispute in the earliest phase of its emergence.[56]

Śrīvaiṣṇava soteriology at least from the time of its consolidation, i.e., the 12th century, is based upon the conviction that the divine plan for human salva-

56 For a detailed examination of this early phase of the dispute see Raman 2004 and Raman forthc. a. For full-length studies of the mature phase of the dispute in the writings of Piḷḷai Lōkācārya and Vedānta Deśika see Jagadeesan (1977) and Mumme (1988).

tion is ultimately unfathomable. Not capricious but beyond human perception. The Southern School of Śrīvaiṣṇavism endorsed the view that the ideal stance to be adopted by the human being in the face of this unfathomability would be to arrive at a full cognition of one's utter helplessness followed by a surrender to the divine plan. The rare few who do this are "resorting to Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa", doing, variously, *prapatti/āśrayaṇa/samāśrayaṇa* which is, in effect, pure contemplation of this fact of their helplessness. Called *adhyavasāya* or *anusaṃdhāna*, it is this kind of *samāśrayaṇa* which is the guarantee of salvation. This definition of *samāśrayaṇa* became widespread in the post-Rāmānuja theological commentaries of the *ācāryas* Nañcīyar, Naṃpiḷḷai and their disciples and ultimately derives its legitimacy from Rāmānuja's interpretation of certain chapters and verses of the *Bhagavadgītā*. From this perspective, *samāśrayaṇa* is not a ritual at all but only a specific kind of cognition. One does not do anything, one just realizes the truth and those rare few who do so are called men of wisdom, *jñānīs*. The Northern School of Śrīvaiṣṇavism held the view that, as far as the non-enlightened majority of Viṣṇu *bhaktas* are concerned, the *prapatti/samāśrayaṇa* done in whatever form, without or prior to the acquisition of this superior knowledge which the *jñānī* possesses, is a ritual and has the specific power of ritual to bring about certain specific consequences—whether the qualification for further ritual activity or as expiation for demerit (*pāpa*). This interpretation of *prapatti/samāśrayaṇa* as ritual is also present in the commentaries of the post-Rāmānuja *ācāryas* such as Piḷḷāṉ and ultimately derives its legitimacy from other textual passages of the *Bhagavadgītā* as well as *stotra* literature.

In the final analysis, then, even the Śrīvaiṣṇava Teṉkalai theological literature on *prapatti/samāśrayaṇa* is at pains not to repudiate ritual as such. Rather, it differentiates between various kinds of intentionality and held that the one correct intentionality, which is the recognition that one was not the agent of ritual action or of one's own salvation, transformed ritual activity into pure cognition, into non-ritual and a guarantee of salvation. The term *prapatti/samāśrayaṇa* was particularly useful for generating and encompassing this amplitude of meaning in the theological literature because it could be interpreted both as a resorting to or passive surrender to a higher knowledge just as much as a participation in and active surrender to God through the utterance of a *mantra* during the course of a ritual of surrender—making it both a ritual and non-ritual in Śrīvaiṣṇavism.

The previous sections have shown, though, that at some point in the historical evolution of Śrīvaiṣṇavism, the term *samāśrayaṇa* came to almost exclusively be understood as the *pañcasaṃskāra* ceremony, which is very clearly a ritual. Thus, in effect, both schools of Śrīvaiṣṇavism would appear, at first

glance, to be recommending a ritualized surrender to God. The implication of such a development is that a major theological dispute between the two schools is not reflected in their ritual literature, such as the *Parāśaraviśiṣṭaparamadharmaśāstra* or in their contemporary ritual practice. This, it turns out, is not so, as the final part of the Kāñcīpuram ceremony showed.

The Teṉkalai *samāśrayaṇa*

Once the main part of the *pañcasaṃskāra* ceremony finished in Kāñcīpuram Rajahamsa Chariyar turned to me and said, "It is from now that the difference between those who are Vaṭakalais and those who are Teṉkalais emerges. That is, they [Vaṭakalais] have the tradition (*sampradāya*) that one should do this thing called *prapatti* separately. But [the view of the Teṉkalais is that] one should perform that which is *prapatti* during the *yāgasaṃskāra* itself, that it does not have a separate time, for it is only when one requests the deity of the sacrifice (*yāgadevatā*) to come by saying, 'You please come', by doing *prapatti*, will it come. Hence, it is the tradition of the Teṉkalais to do *prapatti* here itself and not separately, while it is the tradition of the Vaṭakalais that one should do it separately. This *prapatti* will now take place".

Having said this, he went to the shrine in his house. The initiate and her husband faced him, standing next to the door of the shrine on one side and Rajahamsa Chariyar's wife instructed both of them to prostrate in front of the shrine and remain in that position till they were instructed to get up. Rajahamsa Chariyar entered the shrine and began to recite the *Śaraṇāgatigadya*, the devotional hymn attributed to Rāmānuja with folded hands.[57] After completing a shortened version of it he turned to the initiate and her husband and made them recite after him Yāmunācārya's *Stotraratna* verse 22,[58] Tirumaṅkai Āḻvār's *Periyatirumoḻi* I. 9.7[59] and finally Nammāḻvār's *Tiruvāymoḻi* VI. 10.10,[60] all of which verses deal with a situation where the poet acknowledges his own sinfulness and

57 On the authorship of the *Śaraṇāgatigadya* and its significance for Śrīvaiṣṇava ideology see Raman (2004)

58 *Stotraratna* V: 22: *na dharmaniṣṭho 'smi na ca ātmavedī na bhaktimāṃs tava caraṇāravinde | ākiñcanyo 'nanyagatiḥ śaraṇya tvatpādamūlaṃ śaraṇaṃ prapadye ||*

59 *Periyatirumoḻ* I: 9.7: *katiyēyillai niṉṉaruḷallatu eṉakku | nitiyē tirunīrmalai nittilattottē | patiyē paravittoḻum toṇṭar tamakkuk | katiyē uṉṉaikkaṇṭukoṇṭu uyntoḻintēṉē.*

60 *Tiruvāymoḻi* VI: 10.10: *akalakillēṉ iraiyum eṉṟu alarmēlmaṅkai uṟaimārpā | nikaril pukaḻāy ulakammūṉṟuṭayāy eṉṉayāḻvāṉē | nikarilamararmuṉikaṇaṅkaḷ virumpum tiruvēṅkaṭattāṉē | pukaloṉṟillā āṭiyēṉ uṉ aṭikīḻ amarntu pukuntēṉē.*

requests God's grace by surrendering himself to him. This small rite finally concluded the Teṉkalai *pañcasaṃskāra* ceremony.

In order to understand what exactly had happened in this last section of the performance of the Teṉkalai *samāśrayaṇa* ceremony one would have to reflect on Ramanuja Chariyar's words. He, in effect, stated that the Vaṭakalais believe in doing *prapatti* as a separate ritual but the Teṉkalais don't since they consider it an essential part of the *pañcasaṃskāra* ritual or more precisely, as the *yāga-saṃskāra*. In giving his explanation Rajahamsa Chariyar was taking it for granted that I was conversant with the theological dispute about *prapatti/samāśrayaṇa*, which indeed I was. Further, he was proposing that the theology of *prapatti* held by the Teṉkalais and the differing theology of the Vaṭakalais had, in turn, influenced the *pañcasaṃskāra* initiation ritual of both groups, by altering the manner in which each group performed the last section of the ritual. It was not possible for me to discuss with him after the ceremony how he would justify, from the Teṉkalai point of view, the theology of *prapatti/samāśrayaṇa* as cognition with its performance as ritual within the *pañcasaṃskāra* ceremony. But it seems to me that there is one possible answer: that is, as long as the Teṉkalai ritual tradition did not accept *prapatti* as a separate ritual in itself but absolved it as a sub-rite of another main ritual (in this case the *pañcasaṃskāra*) it need not be considered a ritual. In contrast, according to Rajahamsa Chariyar's explanation, the Vaṭakalai ritual tradition adopted the stance that an explicit ritual of *prapatti* and not just of *samāśrayaṇa/pañcasaṃskāra* needs to be done. This observation of Rajahamsa Chariyar's was also confirmed, if only negatively, by the fact that the terminus *prapatti* was never once uttered during the Chennai ceremony but only *samāśrayaṇa*. Hence, in contemporary ritual practice which I witnessed the Teṉkalais do a *samāśrayaṇa/pañcasaṃskāra* ceremony which incorporates *prapatti*, while the Vaṭakalais do a separate *samāśrayaṇa/pañcasaṃskāra* ceremony and a separate *prapatti* ceremony. In both cases, the two schools seem to have consciously restructured a fundamental ritual which bestows Śrīvaiṣṇava identity upon members of their community in such a way as to result in differently practiced *samāśrayaṇa* ceremonies.

In their observations on the issue of how theological texts relate to actual ritual performance (observations quoted in the preface to this volume) Humphrey & Laidlaw (1994: 199) have discouraged the view that there might be a correlation between the two, citing Christopher Fuller's study of the consecration rituals of the priests of the Mīnākṣī temple in Madurai as further evidence for their views. Often a priestly citation of Āgamic sources as the basis for their ritual practice proves to be highly misleading. "The accepted idea that they [such

sources] are authoritative can well go along with almost universal ignorance about their content" (ibid.: 200).

The Teṉkalai *samāśrayaṇa* ceremony could, at one level, be seen as validating this view. Certainly, from the perspective of the initiate the Teṉkalai ceremony, its significance and its possible theological underpinnings would seem not to matter and it would be radically underprescribed, her observance of it largely being a matter of a family tradition which she too chooses to faithfully uphold. Yet, the other main participant or performer of the ritual, Rajahamsa Chariyar was only too aware of its significance and the manner is which it is differently "inflected"[61] from the Vaṭakalai ceremony. In other words, it can be argued that, in the case of the Śrīvaiṣṇava *samāśrayaṇa* ceremony we appear to have a ritual which is considered so crucial to the establishment of the respective, specific, sectarian religious identity that its interpretation is still kept within the control of the religious and theological experts of the community. Hence, in its case, theological exegesis has continued to inform ritual performance and moulded it to the extent that one nowadays entering the Śrīvaiṣṇava community enters it through a ritual by which one is marked as either a Teṉkalai or a Vaṭakalai Vaiṣṇava, at the very moment of initiation.

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61 I am indebted to Alexis Sanderson's insightful use of this term in his studies on Tantric ritual.

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